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EMERGING ISSUES IN THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS AND IN STATISTICS OF MAJOR ECONOMIC SECTORS

Note by the secretariat

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A. National accounts

1. The original United Nations System of National Accounts and Supporting Tables (SNA) was published by the United Nations Statistical Office in 1953. This manual provided the basis for international reporting and served as an aid to the development of statistical programmes in member countries. In the second edition, published in 1959, only minor revisions were introduced.

2. The System of National Accounts underwent further revision and subsequently the Statistical Commission approved the publication of the revised SNA[1/] at its fifteenth session in 1968. Around 1975, the Statistical Office of the United Nations began a review of country experiences in implementing SNA. A series of interregional and regional seminars on SNA were held from 1975 to 1980.[2/] A preliminary report on the findings of the review was presented to the Statistical Commission at its twentieth session in 1979.

3. Two expert group meetings were convened, one in 1980 and the other in 1982, to discuss the general direction of further work on SNA. Both these meetings stressed the importance of clarifying the System and the need to improve its consistency with other international standards in statistics. It was concluded that modifications should safeguard the continuity of the efforts to implement the System and preserve the continuity of time series.

4. In considering the future development of SNA, the 1982 Expert Group concluded as follows:

"(a) That major developments in SNA remained to be undertaken - referring both to the problems discussed in the meeting, as well as others which had not yet been fully articulated or which might emerge in the future;

/"(b)

1/ A System of National Accounts (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.69.XVII.3).

2/ It was not possible to organize such a seminar in the ESCAP region, although several meetings of an expert group on national accounts had been convened in the late 1960s.

"(b) That there was a continuing need for the clarification, modification and extension of SNA;

"(c) That any major revision should not be undertaken as a continuous adjustment, but it should rather be accomplished by a single target date, possibly 1990. To reach such a target, agreement would be needed some years in advance of that date, say by 1985, and this implied that work must start in the near future;

"(d) That certain extensions of the system (e.g. non-market imputations) and a number of clarifications and minor modifications should be undertaken as soon as possible ...;

"(e) That work on the harmonization of the standards of the different international organizations should continue and should have a high priority;

"(f) That 14 years after the publication of SNA, progress in the developing countries in the compilation of various accounts and their availability for use in development planning and policy was far from satisfactory."[3/]

5. The Expert Group also examined issues regarding the harmonization of SNA guidelines with other international standards on external transactions, public sector statistics, monetary statistics and flow of funds, and income distribution statistics, as well as activity classifications and input-output studies.

6. Subsequent to the expert group meeting in 1982, the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts was established with the participation of the United Nations Statistical Office, the Statistical Office of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (SOEC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Working Group has convened several meetings since its establishment in 1982 to identify topics to be included in the SNA review, to co-ordinate work programmes concerning the conceptual development of national accounts, and to outline a strategy for the revision of SNA by 1990.

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3/ E/CN.3/1983/5, para. 4.

A consolidated work programme indicating the agencies responsible for the various topics is as follows:

A. Structure and sectoring of SNA

1. Structure of SNA (OECD)
2. Links between macro and micro data (SOEC)
3. Country practices in institutional sectoring (OECD/United Nations Statistical Office)
4. Unincorporated enterprises (SOEC)
5. Private non-profit institutions serving households (SOEC)
6. Statistical units (OECD)
7. Social accounting matrices (SAM) (World Bank).

B. Price and quantity comparisons

1. Use of chain indices in national accounts (SOEC)
2. Terms of trade (SOEC/OECD/World Bank/United Nations Statistical Office)
3. Deflation in time and space (SOEC).

C. Public sector accounts

1. Reconciliation and/or harmonization of Government Finance Statistics (GFS) and SNA standards with regard to government accounts and tables (United Nations Statistical Office/IMF)
2. Own account production of general government and department enterprises (SOEC)
3. Classification of activities and purposes (SOEC/United Nations Statistical Office)
4. Social security arrangements (IMF).

D. External transactions

1. Reconciliation and/or harmonization of balance-of-payments and SNA standards with regard to external transaction data (United Nations Statistical Office/IMF).

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E. Household sector accounts and income distribution statistics

1. Revision of income distribution statistics guidelines and standards for the household sector accounts in SNA (United Nations Statistical Office/World Bank)

2 Informal activities (United Nations Statistical Office, World Bank, OECD)

3. Final consumption expenditure of households and of Governments (SOEC)

4. Subsidies (SOEC)

5. Income measures (SOEC)

6. Pensions and life insurance transactions (OECD)

7. Interest (OECD/United Nations Statistical Office).

F. Financial flows, balance sheets and reconciliation accounts

1. Draft supplementary guidelines for statistics of financial flows, balance sheets and reconciliation accounts with SNA (United Nations Statistical Office)

2. Bridge table between SNA and the IMF draft "Guide to money and banking statistics in international financial statistics" (United Nations Statistical Office/IMF)

3. Classification of financial assets and liabilities (IMF)

4. Inflation accounting (SOEC/OECD)

5. Depletion of subsoil assets (United Nations Statistical Office/OECD)

6. Financial leasing (SOEC).

G. Production accounts

1. Handbook of National Accounting (United Nations Statistical Office)

2. SNA input-output standards (United Nations Statistical Office)

3. Services (OECD).

H. Reconciliation with other accounting systems

1. Regional accounts (SOEC/United Nations Statistical Office)

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2. Quarterly national accounts (OECD)

3. Development of the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS) and study of SNA-MPS links (United Nations Statistical Office/CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance)).

7. The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts recommended that the SNA review should take place along the following lines:

(a) Studies on the topics concerned should be discussed at regional meetings at which national statistical offices would be represented;

(b) Expert group meetings should be convened, each of which would take up a group of subjects;

(c) One or a few expert group meetings should be held to integrate the recommendations of the separate expert group meetings into a revised version of SNA that would take into account the required consistency of the various elements of the national accounting framework. The approximate timing of the above group activities was planned for 1983-1985, 1986-1988, and 1989-1990, respectively.

8. In the ESCAP region, SNA is the most widely used framework for the presentation of macro-economic data, and has provided essential information for economic and social development planning. ESCAP members are mainly developing countries which vary in the stage to which their statistical capabilities have been developed. It is thus important that the views and needs of these countries should be incorporated in the SNA review.

9. At the global level, the Statistical Commission has been devoting increasing attention to the situation of developing countries in the process of revising the SNA. At its 1983 session, it decided that high priority should be assigned in the revision to selected non-market imputations and the distribution of income, topics which were particularly relevant to developing countries. As mentioned in paragraph 11 of document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/3, the Statistical Commission, at its twenty-third session in 1985 recommended that special attention should be paid to the difficulties faced by developing countries, and that international

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organizations should provide handbooks and various other forms of technical assistance to help the developing countries apply both the current SNA and its successor.

10. Of the various aspects of SNA currently under review, the Statistical Commission identified several as being of special importance to developing countries. Those included subsistence activities, public sector accounts, dual sectoring and subsidies designed to redistribute income to particular groups of consumers. It was also suggested that the next version of SNA should distinguish small-scale "informal" producers from large-scale "modern" enterprises. Some representatives at the session noted that the current SNA was still not being fully implemented by all countries, owing to the weakness of basic information; one conclusion that could be drawn was that the next revision should be simpler to apply and easier to understand. The Statistical Commission agreed that in the next revision of SNA, it would be important to take full account of both the analytical needs and the statistical possibilities of developing countries.

11. The regional commissions have been requested to contribute to the work of revising the SNA on an active basis. Moreover, the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session indicated that the whole range of work on national accounts should receive priority, and that technical meetings should be convened. ESCAP had therefore planned to organize a seminar on review and development of national accounts in early 1985. As suggested by the Committee, the secretariat has also requested statistical organizations in the region to provide their views on the revision of SNA, in part as an input into the seminar. Unfortunately, owing to funding difficulties, the seminar has had to be postponed to early 1986; the secretariat is making concerted efforts to obtain extrabudgetary financial support for this activity, and will give the Committee an updated report on its status.

12. The countries which responded to the enquiry reported that the following areas, among others, would need attention in the revision of the SNA. While a detailed technical discussion of the issues would be carried out more appropriately in the seminar proposed to be organized for that purpose, in view of the subject's importance it would be helpful for the Committee to give its comments and suggestions.

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(a) Private non-profit institutions serving households

It has been suggested that non-profit institutions serving households should be treated as a sub-sector of households rather than as a sector on their own.

(b) Statistical units in SNA and the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities (ISIC)

The 1968 SNA provided a definition for all transactor units involved in economic activity and set this into a framework which ensures consistency between the various types of units and between transactors and transactions and their classifications. The ISIC provides a more detailed description of units. However, it envisages differing units for different industrial activities and does not present a rigorous statement of the relationship between types of units. It was suggested that more explicit instructions for interpretation were necessary to further statistical integration.

(c) Classification of construction activity

In developing countries in the region, construction activities carried out by petty contractors and by households themselves are substantial. Data on these construction activities are difficult to gather, and especially when construction materials are produced by the households themselves. There may therefore be a need to examine the classification and data collection methods for construction activity.

(d) Unincorporated enterprises

Unincorporated public enterprises with identifiable accounts are classified as "industries of government" according to the present SNA. It has been suggested that this classification may be subject to a further criterion on the level of subsidies. Those enterprises for which subsidies amount to a large proportion of the production cost might be classified as producers of government services.

It has also been suggested that unincorporated private enterprises should be classified into two sub-sectors, "Household enterprises" and "Non-household enterprises", depending on whether the accounts can be identified separately from those of other activities of the households. Under this criterion, "Household enterprises" refer to economic activities

of which the accounts are combined with those of other activities of household, while "Non-household enterprises" are those where separate accounts are maintained.

(e) Definition of general government

It has been suggested that the definition of "General government" should be elaborated to avoid ambiguity. The SNA should also provide sufficient guidelines to ensure similar treatment, in different countries, of producers of government services and government final consumption expenditure.

(f) Terms of trade

The issues of making a terms of trade adjustment to GDP at constant prices are complex and beset with both practical and theoretical problems; these need to be examined.

(g) Presentation of external transaction accounts

To link the external transactions account with other accounts in the SNA, imports of merchandise are valued c.i.f. (cost, insurance, freight), inclusive of insurance and freight services provided by resident industries of the importing country. These services are recorded as exports for balance-of-payments compilation. This could cause confusion. It has been suggested that the presentation of external transaction accounts should be reviewed.

(h) Imputed bank service charges

The present SNA recommends that imputed bank service charges should be treated as intermediate consumption of a nominal industry. Such treatment understates the GDP value, especially in those countries which have extensive international banking operations. It also creates problems, especially in the compilation of input-output tables. It has been suggested that the method of imputing bank service charge as well as the allocation of such imputations should be reviewed.

(i) Pensions and insurance

Some business employers adopt retirement allowance schemes and they administer these funds in their own accounts. The employers' contributions to the fund are regarded by them as compensation of

employees and the employees have a legal right to the funds. The question of treatment of the increase or decrease in funds owing to the payment of retirement allowances arises. It appears doubtful that the net change in the reserves should be classified as a change in "net equity of households on life insurance reserves and on pension funds" in the capital finance accounts, since this financial item represents the transactions between households and financial institutions. The funds may perhaps be treated as other financial assets of households.

It has also been suggested that the treatment of pensions and insurance in SNA is rather cumbersome and needs to be simplified.

(j) Subsidies

Public corporations may be granted subsidies to keep the prices of commodities, such as food grains, at a low level for the benefit of consumers. Although the grants are paid directly to the corporation, the benefits of such grants accrue to the consumers. It has been suggested that the treatment of such grants, which are given as a result of government policy, needs to be examined.

(k) Consumption of fixed assets

The estimates for consumption of fixed assets in most countries are based on depreciation allowances allowed by the tax authorities. Depreciation allowances are granted for the use of land, such as for the use of earth for making bricks (depletion of land resulting in a reduction of its value). Such land is not treated as a fixed asset in the SNA; the treatment of these and similar cases needs to be clarified.

(l) Capital loss

Capital losses due to unforeseen obsolescence of fixed assets, and natural calamities such as earthquakes, floods and cyclones or as a result of war, are not included in the consumption of fixed capital in the SNA. Some of these capital losses cannot be quantified in surveys, as they may be netted out when the capital formation data are estimated. The proper treatment of such cases needs to be clarified.

(m) Measurement of output and its valuation

In terms of coverage, certain types of economic activities are difficult to quantify and are thus understated or ignored in the compilation framework. Some examples are the output of shipowners,

transactions relating to second-hand goods, and activities in the informal sector. As regards concepts, definitions and method of estimation, the SNA does not deal with the estimation of outputs of real estate development and financial leasing activities very explicity. Besides, the estimation of the real outputs of services presents problems in the compilation of constant price estimates. In particular, it has been suggested that the estimation of the real output of financing, insurance, real estate and business services and of community, social and personal services needs to be examined and that more specific guidelines are required in the revised SNA.

In the present SNA, subsistence production covers only the primary sector and own account construction. It has been suggested that studies need to be undertaken to consider covering the unpaid services of households as well as the services of consumer durables.

(n) Rent on factories and business premises

In the compilation of input-output tables and the public sector accounts, the present SNA recommends that rent should be treated as a commodity. The inclusion of rent as an intermediate input into the production process will influence the data on value added of the establishments, depending on whether the office or factory premises are rented or owned. For the sake of consistency, it has been suggested that rents for owner-occupied factory or business premises may need to be imputed. Alternatively, rent might be treated as a non-commodity item.

(o) Human capital formation

Human resource development accounts for a significant amount of development expenditure. It has been suggested that a concept of "human capital development" should be introduced and that studies be made to include part of the expenditures on education, health and other relevant expenditures on human resource developments in human capital formation as a subgroup of gross capital formation.

(p) Quarterly accounts

The current SNA indicates the desirability of compiling certain types of data on a quarterly basis. In some of the developing countries of the region, even annual data are not available on a regular basis;

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preparation of quarterly accounts at the present time appears too ambitious. Some countries may perhaps wish to prepare biannual accounts.

(q) Other matters

It has been suggested that national accounts statistics as illustrated by SNA are complicated and difficult to comprehend. A simplified illustration of the system would facilitate the use of such data by general users and policy makers.

13. The above issues and others, such as the treatment of allowance for bad debts, the choice between cash basis and accrual basis for income estimation, the treatment of government revenue on purchases by households of goods and services produced by government, the estimation of provincial and subnational accounts, and a host of other topics relevant to the region, will be subjects for discussion in the revision of SNA.

14. The Committee is invited to provide guidance and suggestions on how regional requirements could be properly included and reflected in the revision of the SNA targeted for completion in 1990, as well as the role ESCAP should play in this regard.

B. Other economic statistics

15. Aside from the various issues relating to the revision of SNA, the reliability of any national accounting aggregates will obviously depend on the quality of statistics used as inputs. The source data need to be of reasonable quality in order to produce acceptable national accounts statistics. In this regard, the adequate quantification of the contribution to GDP of economic sectors such as industry, transport, trade and so on needs to be reviewed.

Transport statistics

16. Virtually every aspect of the economy depends to a certain extent on transport facilities. Reliable statistics on transport are required for several purposes, including an estimation of the cost of transport for the compilation of national accounts statistics. With the exception of economic statistics on shipping, work on improving and harmonizing transportation statistics at both national and international levels has so far received low priority. In fact, a manual on transport statistics was produced by the United Nations Statistical Office in 1951 but this version

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has yet to be revised, despite the tremendous development in transport vehicles and modes of transport over the last three decades.

17. Recognizing the need for an integrated approach to the planning of transport and communications development, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, at its fortieth session, proclaimed the Transport and Communications Decade for Asia and the Pacific, 1985-1994. In support of this proclamation and in view of the need to develop transport statistics in national statistical systems, the secretariat has formulated or revised project proposals for two activities: a workshop on transport statistics, and advisory services on transport statistics. The Committee may recall that the need for a workshop on transport statistics has been recognized for many years, but funds have not been forthcoming to date. It appears likely, however, that such a meeting can be organized in 1986 under the United Nations regular budget for technical co-operation, with host facilities being provided by the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Advisory services on transport statistics could only be undertaken through extrabudgetary support, and the secretariat is now reviewing possible sources of funds. The Committee is invited to give its views on these projects and provide guidance on the course of action to be adopted by the secretariat in the development of transport statistics in the region.

International trade statistics

18. International trade statistics is one of the most developed branches of economic statistics in the region. Following its earlier work on improving and harmonizing trade statistics, the secretariat initiated in 1981 a project to prepare a manual for the compilation of international trade statistics in the ESCAP region. A draft manual was produced in 1982, and a revised manual incorporating the views of the expert group meeting held in 1983 is now available for distribution.

19. Although many conceptual problems in international trade statistics have been resolved, some national statistical series on international trade have not been timely owing to the large volume of documents needed for data compilation. For many operational purposes, trade data must appear promptly. The problems lie in both data preparation and data processing. It is envisaged that with the upgrading of data processing skills, the time-lag in disseminating trade data may be shortened.

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20. The first and second revisions of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) enjoyed a close correlation with the Customs Co-operation Council Nomenclature (CCCN). A revised CCCN, together with the new HS (Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System) being developed under the auspices of the Customs Co-operation Council, is scheduled to become effective on 1 January 1987. The need to maintain a close correlation with CCCN and to establish a relationship with HS has led to the revision of SITC. The third revision of SITC has taken into account the need to harmonize, to the extent possible, with the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) and the draft Central Product Classification (CPC) drawn up by the United Nations Statistical Office/SOEC Joint Working Group on World Level Classifications. It will, however, retain the basic character and structure of SITC. As with the previous versions of SITC, the third revision may be expanded or contracted depending on local conditions.

21. As noted in the annex to document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/3, the Statistical Commission (and subsequently the Economic and Social Council) has recommended that Governments should report internationally their external trade data on the basis of SITC, Rev. 3, as far and as soon as possible. It is realized that countries may not wish to make this change until they review their customs tariff nomenclature in the light of HS. The United Nations Secretariat is to publish SITC Rev. 3 along with commodity indexes and correlation codes to the CCCN, HS and BEC (the Classification by Broad Economic Categories). The aim is that SITC data published by the United Nations for 1988 should be, as far as possible, in the form of SITC, Rev. 3. The Committee may wish to comment on these recommendations and arrangements, and provide guidance on other possible steps to achieve better international comparability of external trade statistics.

Energy statistics

22. The vital role of energy statistics in the assessment of the current energy situation and as an indispensable tool for planning and decision-making can hardly be overstated. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics, at its fourth session held in June 1981, stated that "training in the field of energy statistics was essential and of the highest

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priority".[4/] Accordingly, as reported to the Committee at its fifth session, the secretariat organized an expert group meeting from 25 to 29 October 1982 to devise a detailed programme and curriculum for a four-week training course. Subsequently the course was organized from 26 September to 21 October 1983 at the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC) in Kuala Lumpur. It was organized in association with SIAP and APDC and with financial support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the regional energy development programme. The curriculum covered measurement of energy in its various forms, collection of data and construction of energy balances. A report on the training course was distributed earlier to national statistical offices of the region; additional copies are available on request.

23. As mentioned in document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/6, SIAP has conducted a number of activities in the field of energy statistics, including an advanced course in 1984 and a country course in Pakistan in 1985.

24. To further improve energy planning capabilities in member and associate member countries, the secretariat has acquired the services of an adviser in energy statistics. The adviser is financed through the regional energy development programme, which is funded by UNDP. The adviser is scheduled to join the secretariat on 30 September 1985. His services can be made available free of charge to Asian countries. The Pacific energy development programme (PEDP) will contribute to the cost of missions undertaken by the adviser to the Pacific countries. The Committee may wish to comment and suggest additional activities for developing energy statistics in the region. In this connection it is planned to hold, tentatively in early 1987, a workshop to review international recommendations on energy statistics.

Economic statistics of shipping

25. At its twenty-sixth session in April 1970, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific endorsed the secretariat's proposal to develop a uniform system of economic statistics of shipping. The secretariat has since developed the methodology of such a system (the L.2 scheme) and assisted a number of countries in its implementation. The

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4/ E/ESCAP/STAT.4/23, para. 84.

Statistical Commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, at its twentieth session in February 1979, discussed the uniform L.2 scheme and decided that it should be promoted among all developing countries, including those outside the Asian and Pacific region. In addition, it invited interested countries, including developed countries, to examine the possibility of adopting the framework of the system.[5/]

26. Since the fifth session of the Committee, a series of mobile workshops on shipping statistics have been held in the capitals of the member countries of ASEAN in July and August 1983. The secretariat also organized a Regional Seminar on Economic Statistics of Shipping at Beijing in June 1984. The meetings recommended, inter alia, that the secretariat should (a) organize further follow-up study exercises to exchange experience in the implementation of the L.2 sheme among members and associate members in the region, and (b) continue to provide advisory services in the implementation of the L.2 scheme.

27. The secretariat published the third edition of the "Uniform system of economic statistics of shipping (L.2 scheme)" in 1984. It has also published a draft handbook, the contents of which have subsequently been discussed in the various workshops and seminars on the subject organized by the secretariat. The suggestions and recommendations made therein will be incorporated in the handbook, which will be published in due course.

Industrial statistics

28. The 1983 World Programme of Industrial Statistics was promoted by the United Nations Statistical Office to encourage the orderly development of national inquiries into the structure and activity of the industrial sector. In support of this programme, the secretariat, through the financial support of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, acquired the services of a regional adviser on industrial statistics. The adviser joined the secretariat in July 1983 and left in August 1985 when funding lapsed. During that period, the adviser fielded 18 missions to 14 countries in the region. The regional advisory services appeared to have

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5/ Report of the Statistical Commission on its twentieth session (Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 3), paras. 27 and 29 (e)).

been beneficial to those countries which the adviser served. Although industrial statistics have reached a fairly developed stage in some countries in the region, other statistically less developed countries might still require assistance to establish a proper industrial statistics collection system. The Committee is requested to provide guidance on whether regional advisory services in industrial statistics should be reinstated, or suggest other activities which should be undertaken to further develop industrial statistics in the region.

C. Meetings related to economic statistics

29. Since the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics, the secretariat has organized four technical meetings related to the development of economic statistics. The reports of these activities are available to the Committes for its comments and views.

Pacific Subregional Workshop on Price Statistics

30. The Pacific Subregional Workshop on Price Statistics was held from 3 to 8 October 1983 at Port Vila, Vanuatu. The Workshop was organized with financial support from the Government of Australia, and the Government of Vanuatu provided host facilities. It discussed the role of household expenditure surveys and other data sources in the construction and revision of consumer price indices. It focused on practical aspects in the compilation of consumer price indexes, including the special problems in data collection faced by the island countries of the Pacific. In addition, it examined the approach to the consumer price index adopted in Australia. The Workshop also discussed indexes relating to goods entering international trade as well as the integrated and co-ordinated approach to the development of price statistics being promoted by the United Nations Statistical Office. It noted, among other things, that if computer programming skills were available, processing of consumer price indexes could be handled easily by microcomputers. The report of the Workshop is presented in document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/10.

Asia-Pacific Meeting of Statisticians on Input-Output Tables

31. The use of input-output techniques for understanding the structure and the interrelationship of various economic sectors has been widely accepted. However, the regular compilation of such tables has not yet become a general or widespread practice. In the light of this and in the

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context of the implementation and revision of SNA, the secretariat organized the Asia-Pacific Meeting of Statisticians on Input-Output Tables at Tokyo from 13 to 19 March 1984, with financial support and host facilities provided by the Government of Japan. The Meeting considered problems concerning the compilation of input-output tables, such as sources and methods, constant price tables, fixed capital matrix and employment matrix, and so on. It also considered the uses of input-output tables, including their utilization in economic planning and analysis. The Meeting recognized the need for adequate data for input-output work, especially data relating to the household and informal sectors, and in this connection supported the National Household Survey Capability Programme. The report of the meeting is presented in document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/9.

Asia-Pacific Seminar on the International Comparison Project and Price Statistics

32. Although considerable progress has been made in standardizing accounting methods in GDP and national accounts estimates, the conversion of various country estimates into a common currency for direct comparison presents many problems. The International Comparison Project (ICP), which was launched in 1968 to develop appropriate methodologies for resolving comparison problems, has progressed through its first four phases; the fifth phase, emphasizing methodologies for developing countries, begins in 1985. In view of the importance of price statistics in both national and international statistical systems and in the context of the revision of the SNA, the secretariat organized the Asia-Pacific Seminar on ICP and Price Statistics at Sapporo, Japan from 16 to 22 October 1984, with financial support and host facilities provided by the Government of Japan.

33. The Seminar reviewed the status of price statistics in the ESCAP region. It discussed the expenditure framework and methodological issues of ICP and problems in making price comparisons. The Seminar recommended, inter alia, that ICP activities should be integrated with national accounts compilation work in general. It noted that the secretariat, in accordance with the priorities mandated by member countries, had hitherto done little work on ICP. It recommended that ESCAP should henceforth play a more active role in ICP in the region, although not at the expense of any of its existing responsibilities and priorities. Efforts should

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therefore be made to augment the capacity and resources available to the secretariat appropriately. The Seminar noted that participation in ICP would enhance international comparability of statistics among countries of the region. The report of the meeting is presented in document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/11. While the Government of Japan has indicated that it is exploring the possibility of providing technical assistance to help countries of the region participate in ICP, the secretariat nevertheless wishes to seek the guidance of the Committee on the extent of its involvement in ICP activities, while maintaining the existing responsibilities and priorities of the work programme.

SIAP/ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Developing Statistics of Household Economic Activities

34. Economic statistics collected through establishment surveys are fairly well developed in many countries in the region. There exists an abundance of literature and guidelines on the collection of data in the organized sector. Data on economic activities of the unorganized sector, at household level, are important especially in most developing countries where the contribution to GDP of household economic activities is quite substantial. International standards or guidelines for organizing surveys of household economic activities have yet to be developed, although some countries in the region have done work in this area. In view of the importance of data on economic activities at household level in the compilation of national accounts as well as the desirability of having uniform concepts and definitions, and possibly a common approach to collecting such data among countries in the ESCAP region, the secretariat, in collaboration with SIAP, organized the SIAP/ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Developing Statistics of Household Economic Activities. The Meeting was held at Bangkok from 23 to 28 September 1985. It discussed specific requirements for data relating to household economic activities for national accounts and planning; the definition, scope, concepts, survey methods, analysis and evaluation relating to such data; and the integration of information collected from different sources. The report of the meeting is presented in document E/ESCAP/STAT.6/12.

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